

HR Field Guide: 5 Tips to Effective Mobile Learning

Mobile learning is extending the reach of how organizations deliver training - providing the benefits of e-Learning to users who were previously 'out of reach'. By expanding the access of e-Learning, mobile learning enables organizations to provide knowledge and training to employees, partners and customers in new ways increasing productivity and customer service. This field guide will explore five critical steps to ensure that you get the most out of your mobile learning investment.

Introduction

Mobile Learning solutions are significantly expanding how organizations train their employees, contractors, customers, and partners by allowing users to access content from anywhere, anytime more easily. Using a wide range of mobile computing platforms – from mobile phones, such as iPhones, Blackberrys and Google Android phones, to tablet computers, such as Apple's iPad, this new innovation in learning enabling more dynamic access to learning while still allowing administrators and developers to repurpose and use existing learning content – giving organizations consistency and flexibility. Whether providing certification-based or informal training, organizations that invest in this new and powerful technology can expect to achieve numerous benefits:

- Reach workers or affiliates who do not have easy access to computers – such as in retail or shop floor environments
- Provide direct training for individuals who are in remote locations without easy access to internet connections – such as oil rig workers or field personnel or frequent travelers who want access while in-flight
- Enable customers and partners easy access to training materials to extend learning outside of organization
- Leverage existing learning content for varying audiences to reduce administration costs
- Access centralized reporting on all learning delivered (both mobile and computer-based) from within same infrastructure

TIP #1: MAKE USER EXPERIENCE EASY & INTUITIVE

The most successful solutions in learning, mobile or other, are those that are intuitive, and deliver the content quickly and reliably. The first requirement to achieving this in a mobile learning solution means using a solution that provides native applications on the most popular mobile platforms – iPad, iPhone, Blackberry and Android platforms. By contrast, browser based mobile applications fail to provide a good user experience because they have poor performance, and cannot match the functional ease of use that native mobile apps provide.

The second part of a compelling user experience is the delivery of rapid, consistent content on your chosen mobile platform. Because mobile networks are still inconsistent – with dead-spots, weak connections and slow speeds – the best solution is to support downloading the content in advance and delivering it locally offline. This ensures that your users always receive a rapid, consistent experience where ever they are – regardless of network connectivity.

Benefits of providing an easy, immediate user experience include:

- Gains immediate and lasting user adoption. If the mobile solution is hard to use or the content is slow, users are likely to abandon the solution
- Makes learning experience more “sticky” - where users return to review or expand on their learning experience
- Achieves business objectives of your learning investment and delivers quantifiable ROI

Key questions to ask to consider when evaluating a mobile learning solution’s user experience are:

1. Does the mobile solution have native device support for the mobile platform(s) your organization will use – such as iPhone, Blackberry and Android?
2. Does the mobile solution provide the ability to download and play content offline?
3. Will your mobile application offer the features you need – such as a course catalog and support for multi-media learning content?

4. Is the mobile solution able to be imbedded within your current LMS so device and user administration can be done centrally?

TIP #2: MAKE CONTENT COMPELLING

Content is king and the more compelling the content, the better. So a successful mobile learning solution needs to be able to provide users compelling content, as well. And today's mobile devices have near perfect audio and video delivery capabilities – so any mobile learning solution should be able to leverage these capabilities and deliver e-Learning content in both audio and video formats on the device(s) your organization is using.

Benefits of using rich audio and video content include:

- Engaging audio and video content on a mobile learning device can strongly improve your user adoption on the mobile platform
- Multi-media can also improve your solution's stickiness – improving the odds that users will return multiple times to use the mobile solution
- Improving user's retention of knowledge. Because multimedia is capable of conveying a lot of information and content in a short amount of time and it is often very engaging, it can often help improve the knowledge retention for the user.

Key questions to ask when considering delivering compelling content to users:

1. Does your mobile solution support downloading and using rich multi-media content?
2. Does your mobile solution require that content to be streamed or does it support downloading? Streaming only solutions can seriously impact experience quality for the user because mobile connectivity is still very inconsistent.
3. Are you going to use Adobe Flash content? If so, does your organization use the Apple iPad / iPhone platform, as Apple currently does not support Flash.

TIP #3: REPURPOSE EXISTING CONTENT

Most organizations make large investments in content, as well as content development platforms and standards so that learning systems can achieve their business objectives. Selecting a solution that will let you efficiently and effectively repurpose this content for your mobile platform is key to the success of the mobile initiative. By contrast, implementing a mobile solution that does not provide a means to repurpose your current content can be extremely costly. Specifically, you can be left with either a mobile solution that has no content or a very expensive cost to re-create all your content from scratch.

To assure your mobile solution will let you repurpose existing content efficiently here are three questions to consider:

1. Does your mobile solution support current e-Learning content standards, such as SCORM? If your content is SCORM compliant and your mobile solution does not support the standard, you will be forced to re-develop it or lose much of the testing and tracking capabilities that standards like SCORM provide
2. Will the mobile solution support your current content development tool? Being able to quickly start repurposing content without needing to ramp up on a new development tool / standard can make a large difference in terms of how rapidly your mobile solution can start showing results
3. Does your mobile solution provide prepackaged templates and tools for developers to quickly take current content and repurpose it for mobile devices? Templates and tools can help developers quickly see what they need to do to meet the form / function requirements of your mobile learning solution

TIP #4: CENTRALIZE REPORTING

Measuring the success of your mobile learning initiative means having the ability to report on the key metrics of your mobile learners. Having a mobile learning solution that does not offer reporting will prevent you from being able to measure the success of your project. Equally important is the ability to merge this data with a learner's existing profile – without this capability your organization is left to managing multiple profiles, transcripts, etc., which is not a very effective or efficient solution. So it is key to evaluate your mobile learning solution to make sure that it provides not just reporting but integrated reporting with the other data in your e-Learning solution.

Some of the benefits of a mobile solution that provides integrated and centralized reporting with your current learning management system include:

- Centralized reporting will let you track key mobile metrics on reach and course completions. This reporting will provide valuable insight about your solution's user adoption rates, the 'stickiness' of the mobile solution, as well as other key metrics on reach you may wish to track
- Enable effective measurement of retention and test scores for mobile learning activities and learners. One standard success metric of mobile learning, beyond simple reach, is knowledge retention – and having a mobile learning solution that offers reporting on test scores from mobile courses will provide a quantitative measurement of this important metric
- Centralized and integrated reporting between mobile learning and your learning management system will allow simple, streamlined tracking on key learning reports – such as learner transcripts and certifications. Without this single, integrated source for all e-Learning data, administrators and others are left to do a large amount of manual labor to accomplish this same result
- A single reporting source will enable easy comparisons between classic e-Learning metrics and mobile learning. This will let you quickly compare where your mobile learning initiative is having the greatest effect and where you need to refine content to make it more effective. Part of the challenge lies in ce?

TIP #5: MAKE ADMINISTRATION EASY & SECURE

Making your mobile solution easy to use is more than imperative for your end-users – it also applies to administration of the solution. Selecting a mobile solution that is both easy to administer while being secure requires several considerations.

The first consideration is ensuring that your mobile solution can be imbedded within your current learning solution – this enables a single centralized administration capability. By contrast, having two separate solutions (one for mobile learning and one for standard e-Learning) will unnecessarily add to administrative overhead and likely add security gaps in your overall e-Learning solution. The second consideration is security: this is uniquely important in the arena of mobile learning because mobile devices can get lost or stolen and you want to make sure that any e-Learning content on the devices remains secure. So to ensure that all content stored on mobile devices across your organization remains secure, your mobile solution needs to provide on-device encryption for all content. In this way, even a lost or stolen device with sensitive content has protection against misuse of the information.

Here are some questions to ask to ensure that your mobile solution is easy to administer and secure:

1. Does your mobile solution allow single-point administration within your existing learning management system? This means being able to centrally administer user accounts, course assignment, and reporting for both traditional eLearning and mobile devices from one place – so you can manage and track which users have mobile learning enabled.
2. Does your mobile learning solution provide content encryption? On device content encryption will ensure that your organization's learning content remains secure even if the mobile device is lost or stolen.

Conclusion

To have a successful mobile learning solution, it is important that it be easy to use and compelling for all your key audiences – users, administrators and content developers. This means selecting a solution that natively supports your organization's mobile platform, integrates seamlessly with your current LMS and allows your organization to repurpose, use and extend the content in which it has already invested.

To summarize the top five tips to an effective mobile learning solution:

1. Make User Experience Easy & Intuitive
2. Make Content Compelling
3. Repurpose Existing Content
4. Centralize Reporting
5. Make Administration Easy & Secure

MORE INFORMATION

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